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"The Birth" Returns to Charlotte Stage for Eighth Consecutive Year

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Office of University Communications

December 12, 2013

Production Developed by GWU Alumnus Nathan Rouse ('02) Tells Nativity Story

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — The unconventional nativity drama

"The Birth," developed by Gardner-Webb alumnus Nathan Rouse

('02), returns to Uptown Charlotte for its eighth Christmas season on the Charlotte stage.

The 2013 season opens on Dec. 12 and runs through Dec. 21 at the Duke Energy Theater, part of Charlotte's Spirit Square.

The season also features a special "Celebration Night" on Dec. 21, during which guests will enjoy a performance of the show at 8 p.m., followed immediately by a talk-back with the cast and a special concert.

Rouse describes "The Birth" as "an unorthodox presentation of the traditional Christmas nativity story." Rouse conceived the idea for "The Birth" while pondering the writings of the Pulitzer-nominated writer, pastor and theologian Frederick Buechner. The show's three central monologues, told from the perspectives of the innkeeper, the wise man, and the shepherd in the nativity story, are based on Buechner's work.

"When reading Buechner for the first time, it really struck me, the depth of the characters from whose perspective he writes," Rouse explained. "We often forget that these are real people. We think of the innkeeper as just somebody who utters one line—"There's no room in the inn." But the monologues help us imagine what that experience must have been like for him. You can imagine that experience haunting him afterward, that he might run from that memory rather than find joy in retelling the story. That perspective put meat on the bones of these characters for me for the first time.

The show also features live acoustic music written originally for "The Birth." The set and costume designs are not the focus, according to Rouse. The show basically takes place on an empty stage, aside from some instruments and a few stools on which the cast members sit. For Rouse and company, the challenge—and the joy—is to sing, to dance, to speak, and to transport the audience to the scene of the nativity through imaginative power alone. It's what he calls the "purist kind of theatre."

"One of the beautiful things about the setup of 'The Birth' is that the actors are not behind a curtain when they're not performing. They're sitting in the open, experiencing and enjoying the performance along with the audience. And as silly as it sounds, I am as compelled by the

material as the audience is. We really have, whether supernaturally or otherwise, found a way to cut through the clutter and discover Christmas in three dimensions."

Schedule of Performances:

Thursday, December 12, 7:30 p.m. – Preview/Starving Artist Fan Night*

Friday, December 13, 8 p.m. – Opening Night featuring talkback with reception

Saturday, December 14, 8 p.m.

Wednesday, December 18, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, December 19, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, December 20, 8 p.m.

Friday, December 20, 11 p.m.

Saturday, December 21, 2 p.m.

Saturday, December 21, 8 p.m. – Celebration Night featuring talkback and concert

For tickets or more information about "The Birth," visit thebirth.net.

Birth Promo from Starving Artist Productions on Vimeo.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, preparing them for career success and for engaged, responsible citizenship in their professional, civic, and spiritual communities.